

From: Phil

Subject: Thank you for 35 extraordinary years

Dear friends and colleagues,

The very first time I was observed teaching a class, in the fall of 1984, our school's principal took a seat in the second row from the back of the room. Fortunately for me, a young woman who commanded the respect of the other students sat behind him. Leading by example, she did what I was unable to do: rally my students to engage in the lesson. Because of her kindness I lived to teach another day. And it is because of the kindness, camaraderie, and generosity of so many others that I have had 35 extraordinary years working in our schools.

At the end of this month, on June 28th, I will retire from the Department of Education. This has been a very difficult decision for me, but one that I have been thinking about for some time. As I do, I want to express my appreciation to the many colleagues and students who have enriched my life. I have been so fortunate to learn so much from all of you.

Thank you to the students, like the young woman I referenced above and countless others, who bring intelligence and joy to our classrooms each day and who have had the patience and grace to help me develop as a teacher and a leader. Thank you to the school leaders and teachers I have been privileged to meet who are the true leaders of our amazing school system. Thank you to my extraordinary colleagues here at Central who so graciously taught me how to do this job and who work tirelessly for our students and the well-being of our great City. Every success I have witnessed these last five and a half years is the work of one, some, or all of you. And, thank you to my colleagues at the High School of Telecommunication Arts and Technology, from whom I learned most of what I know about education, and who continue to build an extraordinary and beautiful school.

For nearly 35 years I have had the great privilege to work alongside an exceptional community of people who share a goal that is much bigger than any one person. In fact, I have always believed that to teach, to work for a school or a school system, is nothing less than to wake up every day believing that a better city, a better country, a better world is possible – and then to be willing to do the work to make that happen.

In “Notes for a Hypothetical Novel,” James Baldwin writes, “A country is only as good . . . only as strong as the people who make it up and the country turns into what the people want it to become . . . I don’t believe any longer that we can afford to say that it is entirely out of our hands. We made the world we’re living in and we have to make it over.”

I am so grateful to have worked with people who have the courage to devote their life’s work to doing exactly what Baldwin calls us to do: remake the world. We know that our ability to transform the world we are living in and ultimately achieve a better and more equitable City rests in our hands. I am proud to know -- as I move on from this extraordinary school system -- the success of our students will continue to rest in your hands.

Sincerely,
Phil